



**The Swiss Arete on  
Mt Sill**

**Trip Notes**

# The Swiss Arete on Mt Sill

One of the great climbs of the Sierra is on 14,162 foot Mt. Sill, the most prominent of the Palisade peaks. The arete is a great sweeping curve, steadily steepening as height is gained. The route is never too easy and never too difficult, just good climbing high above surrounding peaks and alpine lakes. Spectacular views extend out over the Owens Valley to Telescope Peak above Death Valley, the White Mountains to the east, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks to the south and west.

## **Itinerary**

This is a three-day trip at a minimum; sometimes we combine the Swiss Arete with ascents of other neighboring peaks, making a full tour of the Palisade Glacier summits. Our scheduled five-day version of this is called the Palisades High Peaks Camp.

**Day One:** As a three-day trip it is necessary to get to high camp on the first day. We'll usually camp at the Gayley High Camp, below Mt. Gayley at 12,200'. This requires an altitude gain of over 4,000' the first day; therefore a night or two at altitude prior to the trip will help you enjoy the climb more.

**Day Two:** The Swiss Arete starts by crossing the Palisade Glacier, which, though small by other mountain range standards, can have hidden crevasses so it's wise to rope up. Once at the top of Glacier Notch (3rd class, often guarded by a hidden bergschrund where the glacier meets snow and rock on the north side) the route ascends part way up the L-shaped snowfield. One can gain the actual Swiss Arete at many places along the ridge, the further down we move onto the ridge the more rock climbing we'll get. Many third class ramps lead from the L-shaped Snowfield onto the Swiss Arete proper but we like to maximize the climbing by joining the ridge fairly low down and make the climb ten pitches or so. Part way up the climb the route steepens and the crux is reached: either a 5.9 move straight up or the famous "step around" move: a long step and reach to the right brings one to the base of a short, steep, 5.6 hand crack. Easier climbing with many variations leads directly to the summit, 300' above with its fantastic views.

Too soon we have to go down. Descent is via the Starr Route. We descend the ridge some and then turn east onto the shadowed North Face. Some down-climbing and a rappel or lower takes us to the sub peak of Sill, known as Apex Peak. This is the peak that projects from Mt. Sill to the north, just under 14,000' in height. A ledge system quickly brings us to the top of the L-shaped Snowfield. The L-shaped snowfield has melted out over the years and is often more properly names the I-shaped snowfield. We pick up gear and head on down back over Glacier Notch to camp. We sometimes return to a camp near Third Lake after climbing the Swiss Arete, to get a head start on the hike out.

**Day Three:** We will wake up and have breakfast on the last day, then begin our hike out. Depending on where we camp the night before, we may arrive at the trailhead between late morning and early afternoon.

## **Elevations and Distances**

Trailhead to Gayley Camp	8.75 miles	4730' of gain	70' of descent
Gayley Camp to summit to camp	1.60 miles	1850' of gain	1850' of descent
Camp to trailhead	8.75 miles	70' of gain	4730' of descent

## **Meeting place and time**

The course meets at the parking area at the end of the Glacier Lodge Road at 8:00 a.m. on the first day of the trip. Follow Glacier Lodge Road west out of the town of Big Pine. We will meet in the day-use parking area at the end of the road (A road turns left into Glacier Lodge and we may move vehicles there after meeting). Most vehicles will take about 20 to 30 minutes to get here from Big Pine as it's a gain of 3,500'. We will do a gear check here and distribute group equipment.

## **Dates and Prices**

Check the latest brochure, call us or go to our web site for dates and rates. Should minimum participant numbers not be reached you will be given the option of paying our private rate, rescheduling, or canceling. Price includes guiding, permits, all necessary group climbing gear, tents, kitchen gear and breakfast, lunch and dinner daily (you bring hot/cold drinks and snack items). Scheduled dates include USFS trail fees. Private programs do not.

## **Prerequisites**

You should be in good physical condition, have some backpacking experience and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderate pack. Prior experience at altitudes above 10,000' is recommended. You need to be able to follow at the 5.6 level and have experience on multi pitch routes.

## **Ratios**

This is a technical climb and we limit the ratio to two climbers to one guide. This enhances safety and ensures a timely arrival at the summit before potential weather changes.

## **Notes and other information**

The best guidebook is Peter Croft's "The Good, The Great, and the Awesome". Get this from Maximus Press: <http://www.maximuspress.com>. You can also get our unpublished SMC Guide to Mt Sill on-line.

## **Preparing for Success**

If it has been a while since you have climbed outdoors or you are unsure of your current skill level relevant to the climb you wish to undertake, we strongly suggest a "warm-up" day of multi-pitch climbing, such as Crystal Crag. This allows you and your guide to work on systems and communication, increasing your efficiency on the overnight climb. You will do better on the main climb with this day.

Mountain climbing requires endurance. Your objective may be remote (miles in with substantial elevation gain) and you need the stamina to approach, climb, and descend all day (12hrs+). The day prior to the climb consists of an approach with overnight packs. The climbs are often long and sustained with a gully descent. This means long days requiring all day endurance so incorporating endurance training into your fitness regimen is essential.

## **Acclimatization**

The higher in elevation you go, the less oxygen there is in the air. This, combined with very dry air, means you will work harder to do the same activities, get dehydrated faster and recover more slowly. It takes days for your body to adjust to these changes. We highly recommend that you spend at least one night at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000') just prior to the trip. Spending a night in Mammoth would do the trick or better yet, camped at an even higher trailhead, such as the Mosquito Flats trailhead. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info.

## **Bears**

Bears can be a problem at the trailhead. Do not leave food or other scented items (deodorant, soap etc.) in your vehicle. There is limited food locker storage at the trailhead so do not bring extra items with you to the trailhead. Clean up all trash prior to your trip. Failure to take precautions can cause the vehicle to be ripped apart by a bear and the added insult of a fine from the Forest Service.

## **Porters**

Want to do the trip but concerned about carrying the overnight pack through the rough terrain or want to save the knees from the steep descent back down? We can provide the services of a porter to carry the heavier and bulky items, leaving you with a lighter day pack for the trip. Porters can be used for just the up or the down as well. Contact the office for more information.

# Equipment List for The Swiss Arete on Mt Sill

The following list is a general guide and will assist you in packing for the program. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have specific questions regarding equipment or if you need assistance prior to making a purchase. The following list will vary according to the time of year, and your individual requirements. When packing **THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!** Items with a \* can be rented from SMC.

## Climbing equipment

- Boots\*. Lightweight mountaineering or heavy duty hiking boots are required, but also a pair that is compact enough to fit in the climbing pack for the descent. Trail runners or tennies are not acceptable since there may be hard snow to cross. If you have any concerns as to the adequacy of your footwear contact us. We rent mountaineering boots.
- Ice axe.\* A general purpose axe appropriate to your height.
- Crampons.\* These must be compatible with your boots.
- Harness.\* We recommend a comfortable rock climbing style harness.
- Helmet. Should be comfortable and lightweight. We provide these for the program if you do not have your own.
- Two locking carabiners and a couple of non-lockers.\*
- A lightweight belay/rappel device, ATC style.\*
- A 120cm nylon sling.
- Rock shoes\*. Regardless of what anyone tells you they need to be comfortable! You'll be wearing them most of the day.

## Other essentials

- Internal frame backpack of 50-60 L. This must fit all of your personal gear and group equipment. If your pack compresses down you do not need the following item.
- Small day pack for climbing. 20-25L with attachment points for ice axe and crampons.
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about 32°F.
- Sleeping pads. A Thermarest and foam pad. A 3/4 Thermarest on a foam pad makes a good combination. Bring a repair kit along with a Thermarest in case of holes.

## Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic or wool socks.
- Long underwear top and bottom.
- Warm pants, to layer between base and waterproof layer, such as softshell fabric.
- Another fuzzy sweater top, such as fleece or Polartec.
- Pile/fleece/softshell fabric jacket.
- Light down jacket; synthetic fill is second choice. This is optional & can replace the previous item. For in camp or in cold weather.
- Good quality rain/wind pants and rain jacket. Must be water proof and jacket must have a hood. Don't skimp on your rain gear.
- Shorts for on the trail.
- Climbing pants. We like the softshell type fabrics.
- 1 long-sleeve sun shirt. We recommend a "hoody" style though anything that covers your arms and is synthetic is great.
- 1 short-sleeve T-shirt. Synthetic, not cotton, so it can dry quickly and wick sweat from your body on sweaty, but windy, days.
- 1 lightweight pair of polypropylene or similar gloves.
- 1 pair of heavier gloves.
- 1 warm hat/beanie. Synthetics are less itchy than wool.
- Sunhat. Better to cover up than just rely upon sunscreen.

## Etc.

- Sun glasses. Good quality. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair in case of breakage.
- Water carrying system with a capacity of 2-3 liters. We recommend a 2 liter bladder for daily trail use and an additional Klean Kanteen insulated bottle for drink flavoring, coffee, etc. This can be your thermos and additional water bottle.
- Headlamp. With a spare set of batteries.
- Eating and drinking equipment. An insulated mug with a lid. This can double for a bowl. Fork and spoon.
- Pocket knife. Small Swiss army style, not a large Leatherman.
- Personal toiletries. Toothbrush and toothpaste. TP & a ziplock bag to carry out the used.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. 30+ SPF. A 1oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- Personal Medical Kit. The guide will carry a large kit so yours will predominately consist of foot repair items, mild pain killer such as Advil, and bandaids.
- Camera/phone camera. Small enough to fit in a pocket; please no giant cameras with multiple lenses.
- Plastic Trash Sac. Handy for keeping gear in outside the tent should it rain.
- Trekking poles\*. These are not essential, but can be handy on the trail. It is your choice, but they do save the knees on long descents.
- Optional reading material, journal, Kindle, etc.

## Food

- We include meals from lunch on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 3. Bring your own snack items like cliff bars, power bars, or gorp concoctions for all days. Also bring your favorite hot drinks (tea, hot chocolate, cider etc.). A days worth for most people would be 2 bars, 3 ounces of gorp, and perhaps a candy bar. Don't over do it.

## Shared Equipment Provided by SMC

- First aid kit
- Shelter. We will provide lightweight, storm worthy tents. If you have your favorite, by all means bring it, but we do want to pair people up where possible to reduce weight.
- Stove. We provide MSR Whisperlite stoves.
- Group climbing equipment.
- Water purification. A sad but true fact of life is that much Sierra water is contaminated. Iodine may be used individually or the group can carry a gravity style purifier.

## You specifically don't need

- ⊗ Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one).
- ⊗ Deodorant or any toiletries beyond those listed above.
- ⊗ Items that are not on this list.

## Additional Thoughts

- Some people, particularly women, tend to run colder than others. If this is the case add another layer or two, a warmer sleeping bag, warmer boots and extra handwarmers
- Women – see our "Women on the Trail" information sheet at the Women's Trips pages on the website.

200 South Main Street, P.O. Box 95, Bishop, CA 93515

office@sierramountaincenter.com

760.873.8526

www.sierramountaincenter.com